

Canada's Health Warning Messages for Tobacco Products



Labelling a Legally Available, Inherently Harmful Product

WTO Learning Event on
Product Labelling
Geneva, **October 21-22, 2003**



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FEDERAL TOBACCO CONTROL STRATEGY

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Overview

- Objectives; Legal purpose of health labelling; Why mandatory?
- History & description of labelling requirements

'Good Regulatory Practice'

- Rational basis, evidence-based, transparent process
- Relevant implementation bodies
- Enforcement & approaches to ensure conformity

Effectiveness as Policy

- Labelling impact – evaluation results

Trade-Related Issues

- Costs, unintended impacts
- Market access
- Equivalency – relation to international standards
- Lessons learned in Canada
- Technical assistance to developing countries

Legitimate Objective of the Health Message Labelling – To Enhance Risk Awareness

To *enhance public awareness* of the health hazards of using tobacco products



WARNING
TOBACCO USE CAN MAKE YOU IMPOTENT

Cigarettes may cause sexual impotence due to decreased blood flow to the penis. This can prevent you from having an erection.

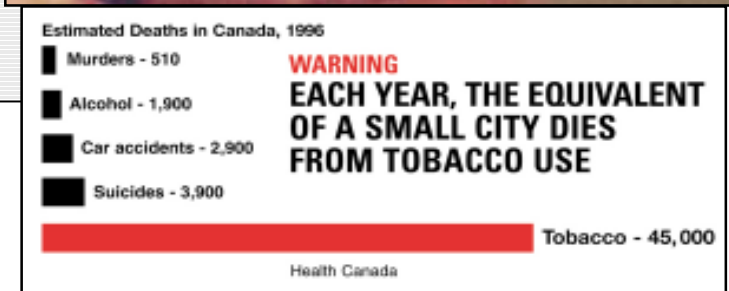
Health Canada



WARNING
CIGARETTES CAUSE MOUTH DISEASES

Cigarette smoke causes oral cancer, gum diseases and tooth loss.

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Why Canadian Tobacco Labels are Mandatory (1989)

- Major Canadian tobacco companies agreed via Voluntary Code to place a single 'moderation' warning label on packs (1972), plus some toxic emission information on sides of packs (1974) and in advertisements
- Companies would not agree to make HWM more salient, use multiple messages (rotation) to reflect emerging public health consensus of the extent, magnitude of the risks
- Health Canada requires review of confidential business information and testing, neither of which companies wish to provide voluntarily



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'Good Regulatory Practice'

- Rational basis
- Evidence-based
- Transparent Process
- Non-discriminatory/National Treatment
- Market access - least trade restrictive approach consistent with national health objectives
- Equivalency: Canadian & international standards
- Canada facilitates compliance
- Some flexibility offered in testing, reporting requirements



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Sample Packaging Changes 1989 - 1998



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Pre-2000 Toxic Constituents Information

Toxic Constituents (Average) /
Substance toxiques (Moyenne)
Tar / Goudron 15 mg, Nicotine 1.3 mg,
Carbon monoxide / Oxyde de carbone 16 mg

Post -2000 Toxic Constituents Information

Toxic emissions/unit Émissions toxiques/gramme
Tar/Goudron 15-34 mg, Nicotine 1.4-3.1 mg, Carbon
monoxide/Monoxyde de carbone 15-29 mg, Formaldehyde/
Formaldéhyde 0.036-0.094 mg, Benzene/Benzène
0.048-0.096 mg, Cyanide/Acide cyanhydrique 0.14-0.27 mg



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Implementing & Enforcing Tobacco Labelling Regulations: Who & How?

- Office of Regulations & Compliance, Tobacco Control Programme, Health Canada (federal government)
- Tobacco inspectors in regional offices inspect at retail
- Federal *Tobacco Act* stipulates penalties for retailers & manufacturers for non-compliance

Do Health Warning Message Labels 'Work'?

IMPACT	MEASURES
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 1st thing seen when buying package• Last thing seen before lighting up	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Legibility• # times read• Message comprehension• Relevance• Strength• Memorability• Wear-out



How Do We Know that Labelling 'Works'?

Results to Date

- Smokers' awareness of the health outcomes of smoking remains high
- Smokers continue to support and approve of the health warning messages – smokers want information
- Messages continue to be noticed
- Smokers continue to read the messages
- Preliminary results from Wave 5 indicate that these results have been maintained up to 18 months after implementation with the graphic health warning labels



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Effectiveness of Canadian Labels

- To be effective, health warning messages must be noticeable, understandable, informative & credible
- Health warning messages on labels “wear out”: a renewal process is in place to develop and consult on new rounds of labelling to keep risk awareness fresh & relevant
- Research & public consultation are key factors in ensuring appropriate health warning messages with impact that is sustained over time



The Canadian Approach and International Standards

- Canada used ISO method as basis for modified 'intense' cigarette testing method
- Providing a range of toxic emission levels better addresses the unique nature of the risks from cigarette smoke
- Canada active in developing the new international measures for package labelling – FCTC (2003)



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What About Costs and Unintended Impacts?

- Costs of printing labels paid by the manufacturers, passed through to consumers, raising the price of tobacco products
- Commercial ventures to sell label “slip covers” & cigarette cases to hide the health warnings, also suggest that graphic warnings covering half of pack are getting through the psychology of risk denial adopted by many smokers

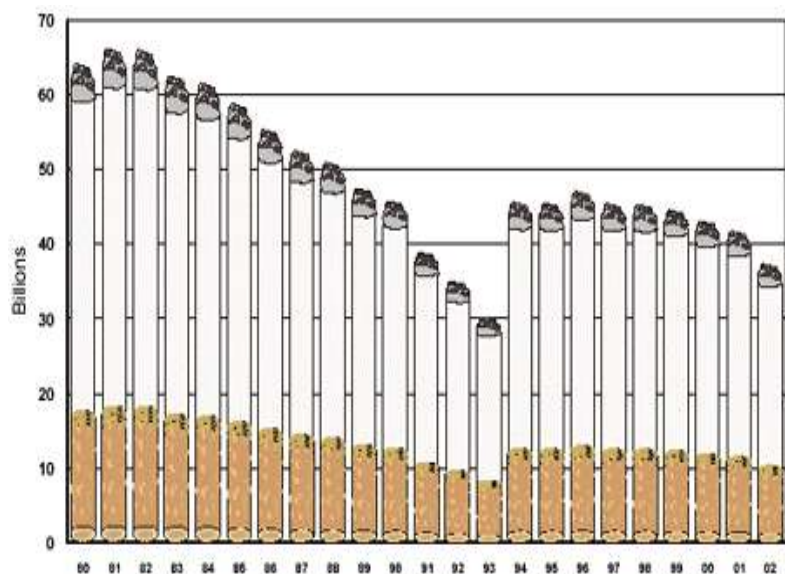


Market Access & Trade

- Consultations, business (BIT) and social impact assessments – open and transparent process
- National treatment -- anyone selling tobacco products on the Canadian market must meet the regulatory requirements (evidence-based)

Impact of Tobacco Reduction Strategy on Domestic/Import Sales of Cigarettes

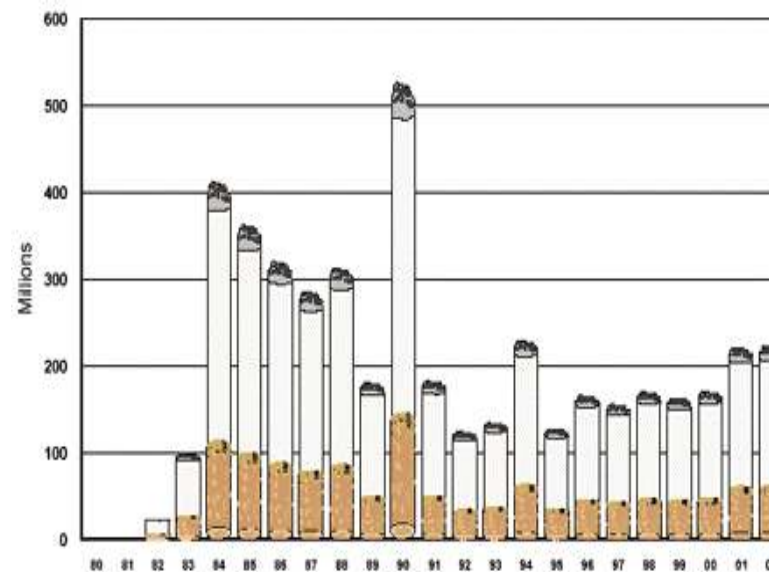
Domestic Cigarettes



Billions of Units

1980 -> 2002

Imported Cigarettes



Millions of Units



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Lessons Learned in Canada about Labelling Tobacco Products

- Health warning message labelling on the product package is a critical component of a comprehensive tobacco control strategy
- Health warning message labels are a cost-effective way to inform the public, especially smokers, of the hazards of tobacco use
- The impact of health warning messages can be measured if outcome measures are specified in terms of what product labelling can reasonably be expected to do (risk awareness)



Canada's Tobacco Product Labels: A Potential World Standard?

- Canada sees itself as a world leader in developing and implementing health warning message labelling, as part of a comprehensive approach to reducing the harm from tobacco product use
- Labelling requirements are backed by ongoing consumer research
- Willing to share expertise & experience with other countries as they implement the FCTC



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Health Canada's Website

www.gosmokefree.ca



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